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AUTHOR Shaughnessy, Michael F.
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ABSTRACT

While the influence of television on reading has only been minimally researched, it is obvious that the more television watching children do, the less time is spent on reading. Over 10 years, the cumulative effects of television viewing can be devastating. Watching television is a passive, receptive activity. Children also watch MTV, rent movies, and spend large amounts of time watching films that contain sexually explicit materials. Reading, on the other hand, is a multifaceted operation which involves speed, comprehension, vocabulary, and retention. Television does not facilitate many of these skills. Many times, parents neglect their responsibilities to their children by allowing their children to watch television rather than spending time interacting with them. Common sense indicates that for children those thousands of hours of watching television could be put to much better use reading, studying, writing, or playing and interacting with other children. Passivity caused by television viewing carries over into the classroom as the child expects to be "spoon fed" as he/she has been on TV. Several technological devices can assist parents in weaning their children from massive amounts of television viewing. Lesson plans, activities, and educational endeavors exist to encourage responsible watching for educational growth and stimulation. (RS)

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Television and Reading

Michael F. Shaughnessy
Eastern New Mexico University
Portales, New Mexico

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The influence of television on reading has only been minimally researched. Obviously, however, the more t.v. watching that one does, the less time is spent on reading. Over ten years, the cumulative effects are devastating. Time that could have been spent reading books is wasted on mindless sitcoms like " Gilligan's Island " .

Good readers spend more time reading. Over the years, their vocabulary and general knowledge develops. Further, their reading comprehension skills grow accordingly. Instead of being " A Nation of Readers " we are, unfortunately, on the whole, " A Nation of Watchers ". What are the effects of prolonged t.v. viewing and watching ?

1) Passivity. Watching t.v. is a return to the womb phenomenon for many. It is a passive, receptive activity . One does not have to " do " anything other than watch and listen. Obviously, one must touch the remote control to change channels, but this too is a sedentary activity. If one critically views the various shows on t.v., one rarely observes any of the characters reading. There is sexual activity and superficial drivel disguised as conversation,

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but rarely does one see any meaningful intellectual conversation.

2) Social Interaction -Unfortunately, very few t.v. characters are the epitome of mental health. Yet, we seem, for whatever reason, to watch the malicious endeavors of J.R. Ewing and the inane banter of Roseanne. The social interaction between most characters is shallow, inance and non-intimate.' T.V. land is full of neurotic individuals who somehow, miracuously solve all of their problems in a half hour sit com. Unfortunately, in real life, it takes at least an hour to solve all of our difficulties. People are protrayed in extremes- either as fully competent individuals who manage all of their difficulties with ease, as as incompetent idiots who muddle through life beset by a plethora of problems. Violence, one upmanship, and skullduggery and backstabbing personify " human relationships " as people express their inner joy for life. Reality is protrayed in T.V. as talking space aliens (ALF), talking horses (Mr. Ed) and many years ago, as talking cars (as in " My Mother the Car- a very ill fated t.v. series).

3) Sexual Preoccupation - A diabolical variant of television, MTV is an attempt to sell rock and roll, heavy and lite metal and sex to our adolescents. Video after video protray Jon Bon Jovi and his " colleagues " in an effort to entertain 12 year old girls.

Periodically, this onslaught is interrupted by new clips about who is on tour and various artists who have either overdosed on some drug or have a new album. A more recent development are various " shows " . One such monstrosity is " Remote Control" wherein three college students attempt to answer trivial drivel to win merchandise. The host looks like he is trying to hold down last nights' supper and the co-host, in a hoarse voice attempts to lend moral support while poorly singing the " oldies " . There is of course a buxom attraction (or should I say distraction) to lend a female element. The entire thing is so ludicrious as to make one either gag with frustration ot turn to a book in despair. If we are ever visited by Martians and they see this programming, they will undoubtedly run back to Mars disgusted or laughing their heads off.

VCR'S- In addition to an astronomical amount of time spent watching t.v., and MTV, children are now renting movies and spending large amounts of time watching the latest Hollywood Epics. By the time this paper reaches print, we will have seen Rocky 9, Cobra 6, and First Blood, Part 5. There is of course a positive side to movies. IF students read the book, either before or after the movie, they can at least compare and contrast the written word to the pictoral event. Unfortunately, too many movies are not linked to any book- paperback or otherwise. Probably even worse yet, many movies contain pronographic sexually explicit materials. While we cannot conclude with 100 % certainty, that pornography affects human growth and psychological development, we can say that a small percentage of people become obsessively preoccupied with sexually explicit materials and a larger percentage learn values regarding sex, live, interpersonal relationships from various semi-pornographic movies shown on t.v. or so called situation comedies with blatant sexual overtones.

Attention and Concentration

One would presume that children who were able to watch t.v. for five, six or seven 7 hours a day (more on weekends) would be able to pay attention for long periods of time in the school environment. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. There does not seem to be much of a relationship between attention span in school and amount of t.v. watchced. Attention span, in and of itself is difficult to objectively measure. Concentration with some children is highly variable. AIME (amount of invested mental energy) is a newer construct designed to reflect people's perceptions of how lonmg and how hard they must process information in order to learn that material.

It should be noted that the relationship between reading and attention span is also of concern. Reading is a multifaceted operation which involves several different components- speed, comprehension, vocabulary and retention. Television does not facilitate many of these skills.

The T.V. As " Baby Sitter "

Unfortunately, the television makes a very good " baby sitter " for a great many parents. For some single parents who cannot afford a baby sitter, the t.v. is a cheap

effective substitute. But the long term effects of prolonged viewing are by no means inexpensive. Decreased literacy, a passive attitude, less time spent reading and studying are all detrimental side effects.

Other parents have children but simply neglect their growth and development. They simply fail to invest the amount of time necessary for the educational growth of their children. Their kids watch an inordinate amount of television perhaps because it is too difficult to restrict t.v. time. Perhaps parents have not as yet recognized the perils of excessive t.v. watching or perhaps these children were not consciously planned for by either or both of the parents. Manley and Luke (1987) indicate that television is a major challenge for parents and educators and that we must rise to the challenge and deal with the enemy in the living room. Edward L. Palmer (1988) feels also that we are in a " crisis of neglect " . Parents neglect their responsibilities to the children to watch t.v. or allow their children to watch t.v. rather than spend time interacting with them.

The Cumulative Effects of Television

Certainly thirty minutes of an innocuous situation comedy is of no major consequence. What is of concern is the effects of hundred of thousands of hours children spend watching mindless idiocy and becoming passive couch potatoes. Obviously, we cannot assess one's personality at age three before a child begins watching t.v., then re-assess the same person at 23. There are too many extraneous variables and too many uncontrolled factors involved. But simple common sense would indicate to any straight thinking Martian that those thousands of hours watching t.v. could be put to much better use reading, studying, writing or at the very least playing or interacting with others. Passivity may bring about more passivity and even obesity. This passivity carries over into the classroom as the child expects to be " spoon fed " as he/she has been on t.v. Even certain " educational " shows for pre-school children may have some negative effects. Kids watch " Sesame Street " for a few years and then arrive at school. Unfortunately, there is no " Big Bird no " Cookie Monster and no " Bert and Ernie " to entertain them. There is no music, guitars and singing and dancing characters to entertain them.

Instead of Mr. Fred Rogers, they get tired old burned out Mrs. I. M. Tired who after 20 years in the classroom is nearing retirement and who is assisted by her aide, Ms M.TuBurnedout who hates kids!

Obviously there are good first, second and third grade techers who are dynamic, energetic, vibrant and dynamic and motivated. Teachers today MUST be superlative to compete with Freddy Krueger, Nintendo, Video-Games, and the like. With the flood fo VCR movies available, books have much competition of late and teachers are competing against Indiana Jones, and Rambo, Rocky and Cobra.

Some Answers

Some parents recognizing the problem have turned to technology to regain control over the t.v. set. One product entitled T.V. Allowance allows parents to decide on the amount of time to be allocated for viewing each week. If the child decides to use all 8 hours on Monday, the t.v. does not turn on until the following week if he/she has been allocated 8 hours per week. This gizmo allows parents to " block out time for homework, for example, from 3:30 to 6:00

p.m. A parental guide helps with pre-installation discussion about the rules and regulations regarding this device.

(Call 800-231-4410)

Time Slot is a similar device, but operates using a card reader instead of inserting numbers. (Call 800 653 5911- if you feel that you child is addicted to t.v. or could go on a t.v. reducing diet !)

Lastly " Supervision " is an electronic device that also helps parents wean their children from the massive amounts of t.v. watching. The 800 number for this " television manager is 800 845-1911.

If you cannot afford a mechanical, electronic device, this author has been involved in a project to teach " Critical Viewing Skills " to parents, teachers and children. This is currently one of the few published programs to aid in a t.v. reduction program and encourage responsible watching for educational growth and stimulation. There are lesson plans, activities and educational endeavors related to television . This program is available from :

Dr. Michael F. Shaughnessy
Center for Teaching Excellence
Eastern New Mexico University
Portales, New Mexico 88130

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